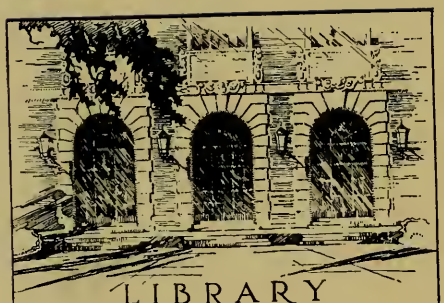

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20

Undenominationalism

AS A PRINCIPLE OF PRIMARY EDUCATION

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LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.
1902

UNDENOMINATIONALISM.

The Education controversy has been a saddening one. So little has there been of mutual understanding, so much of deep-seated, if not determined, suspicion and bitterness. Now there is a pause for a time; a pause of an uneasy and anxious character.

There are, after all, important questions at stake. There is a most serious question of religious liberty. There is even a question of fundamental theological truth. And the pause in itself seems to constitute something more than an opportunity for reviewing the principles involved. There may seem indeed to be little or no political value or meaning in any words said on the subject so far away from the din of politics, or the assumptions which men call practical. And yet it may possibly be a duty to say them.

There is no need to dwell upon the familiar data of the problem. The fact that education was voluntary before it was national: that it grew up largely from the religious motive, and under the shadow of the Church: the consequent fact that, when the State set itself to organize education as a whole, it found the field already occupied to a large extent, though by no means adequately, by denominational schools: the fact that one particular religious body, with an immemorial history, has lived in exceptional relation with the State—whether of dependence or of privilege: the fact that Christian denominations

in England are sharply sundered one from another (though with very varying degrees of sharpness) in their theologies, and their ordinances, and their estimate of the value of ordinances and theologies : the fact that, in spite of all differences, the community as a whole does not desire at all to be either irreligious or non-Christian : these facts, and facts like these, may safely be rather assumed than expounded at large.

The attitude of the community as a whole towards conditions like these has been two-fold. First it has tolerated denominational schools. Toleration has included general regulation, an exacting scrutiny as to efficiency, important pecuniary assistance in relation to secular results, and, as far as possible, a complete ignoring of all that constituted denominational or religious value. Side by side with this toleration, which on one side encouraged, while on another side it studiously ignored, "denominationalism"; the community has very largely supplemented all machinery that existed by establishing a large and ever-increasing system of schools, in the name of the nation, and with practically unlimited command of public money, from which every kind of denominationalism was on principle excluded.

The system, then, has been a dual one. The community has pretty clearly identified itself with the principle of undenominationalism ; while it has tolerated the existence of denominational schools. Its toleration has included subvention, upon conditions, on the whole, of an undenominational kind. But its toleration, and its subventions, have not been such as to promise any permanent continuance of the denominational system. On the contrary, the present crisis largely results from a general recognition that a persistence in the methods of the last thirty years must almost certainly lead to the gradual disappearance of all other than governmental schools.

The present Government bill aims, on the whole, at preventing the disappearance of denominational schools. Probably the larger part of the opposition would prefer that they should disappear. The strength of the opposition rests perhaps mainly in this, that this "undenominationalism" is only the true logical completion of the principle which on the whole has been taken for granted as the basis of the national attitude concerning education, since education became a national affair. On the other hand, the difficulty of the Government position turns largely upon this, that they appear to be endeavouring to counteract an outcome of the basal principle which has been for many years taken nationally for granted, without challenging the justice of the principle itself. It is very difficult to justify a large measure of relief to denominational schools on a basis of undenominational principle. If it is an axiomatic principle that all education provided nationally by the community ought to eschew denominational distinctiveness of every kind; then a national measure for preserving denominational education from being superseded by undenominational is an inconsistency which is open at every turn to the most damaging attacks. To a very large part of the community, strangely enough, the principle just stated does appear to be axiomatic, and indeed self-evident. No wonder that opponents of the bill are often jubilantly confident in their consistency, and that its supporters, even though they feel themselves at bottom to be right, are conscious of a most uncomfortable uncertainty of logic.

But is the principle true? Is it compatible with any real justice or any real liberalism? So long as national "undenominationalism" appears only as a supplement to a serious machinery of denominational education, the inherent viciousness of its assumptions is less apparent. But when there is danger of its occupying

the whole ground, it begins to be easier to discern its real character. What does undenominationalism, as a principle, imply ?

The question, it is to be observed, is about undenominationalism as a principle. Undenominationalism as an accident is quite a different matter. By agreement among individuals for temporary purposes, it would be perfectly possible for Romanists and Anglicans in one direction, or for Congregrationalists or Plymouth Brethren and Anglicans in another, to arrange to share common lessons in some particular religious subjects. But the essence of this possibility depends altogether upon the voluntary and limited character of the alliance. It might be possible, even to a considerable extent, to fall back upon "undenominational" methods, avowedly as a *pis aller*, under difficult and undesirable conditions, in the teaching of schools. But undenominationalism as a positive principle, imposed without consent and without limitation ; undenominationalism as a sort of higher unity, carrying with it the forcible prohibition of all distinctive teaching, in the teeth of the judgment and conscience of those to whom distinctive teaching is of essential value—it is this which is in question. What does undenominationalism, as a positive and coercive principle, imply ? It implies that there is a real essence of Christianity which is capable of being detached alike from all specific forms of dogmatic conviction, and from all particular organizations of government or ministry, and from all corporate obligations of a sacred society—including, amongst other things, the whole range of sacramental experience. It implies that creeds, ministries, sacraments, corporate responsibilities, and all other such things, whether in themselves more or less desirable, are at most subordinate to, as they are in any case quite separable from, a certain central knowledge and essence of Christianity. This central core, it is con-

ceived, both can be, and is to be, maintained, while the subsidiary expressions, or methods, or outworks, are not only not insisted on, but are carefully, and on principle, suppressed.

This distinction between the reality itself, on the one side, and, on the other, all the expressions and methods, and even interpretations, of the reality, is profoundly unphilosophical. The fact that men greatly differ as to interpretations, expressions and methods, does not in the least degree make it more possible to secure the central reality by dispensing with them all. If impartiality is the object of the community, it is in some other direction than this that impartiality is to be found.

Besides being unphilosophical,—which means really, in the last resort, inherently unpractical,—the effort of undenominationalism is also intensely narrow-minded and unjust. No doubt it is, at the first blush, rather tempting to treat all denominational differences as subordinate. It is the outsider's rough and ready method of attempting to be rid of all questions which he sees to be difficult, and does not care to understand. But to treat them as subordinate, and to try to dispense with them, is in fact already to pronounce a judgment about them. It is to pronounce them to be at best unimportant, and inherently beset with doubt. Men think of undenominationalism as purely negative, as though it taught nothing at all about the things which it omits. On the contrary, it teaches that they are to be omitted; and this, in respect of such things as creeds, ministries and sacraments, necessarily amounts to teaching that they are, at the most, immaterial; and this is hardly distinguishable, if distinguishable at all, in experience, from teaching that any earnest teaching about them is positively mischievous because positively false.

It cannot be too often or too strongly insisted that there

is no such thing as purely negative teaching. Every negation contains an affirmation, and every omission implies a positive precept. You cannot, by any possibility, forbid the teaching of what is distinctive—which will include all creeds, catechisms, ministries, sacraments, church duties and privileges, and everything that belongs to Christian theology or experience—without thereby necessarily teaching, through the very prohibition, that insistence on these things may be amiable but must be untrue. You are not only teaching this but teaching it with a force the more irresistible because it is silent, and (as it were) automatic. You are teaching a fundamental habit of mind which the pupils whom you mould will never wholly forget. It is only, indeed, by a serious revolt against the whole principle of their own education that they will ever escape from its practical influence. Nor is the position that all denominations are really, in respect of their differences, more or less wrong, a position which makes in fact (as might superficially be supposed) in the direction of a general peace. It makes only towards general contempt for theological definiteness, a general lack of conviction, and superficiality both of character and of mind.

The fact is, that undenominationalism, so far from being really unsectarian in character, is itself an instance of the sectarian spirit in its most exclusive and aggressive form. It is really itself of the nature of an attempt at a new denomination, more latitudinarian and rationalistic in basis, more illiberal and persecuting in method, than any that before exists. It sins so flagrantly against the first principles of liberalism as actually to attempt the suppression by force of the liberty of every denomination other than itself. And the people are, for the moment, so infatuated with a music of soft phrases, as to applaud the attempt, and believe it to be a triumph of large-hearted liberality.

What has been said by no means exhausts the injustice of undenominationalism. It professes to be at least a measure of equality to all. It is found to be, in working fact, the most galling of inequalities. It only suits precisely the outsider, who with a sort of vague instinct of religiousness, has no particular principles or convictions. It is indeed exactly what he holds to be true. It is an attempt to force his indefiniteness and indifference, by legal compulsion, upon the whole community. It invests him with an importance that is ludicrously undeserved. It does direct injustice, whether more or less, to everyone who has serious convictions upon theological subjects at all.

Meanwhile the injustice which is done to these is very far indeed from being a generally equal, or (in that sense) approximately "just" injustice. To a very large number of nonconformists, and (unfortunately) to a very appreciable number of Church people, it is a comparatively slight injustice; so slight that they feel that little or no real sacrifice is involved in the acceptance of it. Indeed there are those who even accept it with eagerness as a price which they will readily pay for certain immediate advantages: sometimes even, it is to be feared, for the mere satisfaction of seeing it enforced upon those more thoughtful Church people to whom it is an incalculable wrong.

Why is it an incalculable wrong to anyone? Here is a second point (besides the essentially positive character of every negation), which the opponents of the Bill either generally overlook, or at all events make singularly little effort to understand. It is well worth thinking out a little.

There are widely different conceptions as to where the true differentia of Christianity lies. There are those to whom Christianity means primarily an exalted moral standard. The Decalogue, or the Sermon on the Mount,

or the moral ideal of character exhibited on the Cross; —these, as ethical ideals, represent the whole core of the matter. It is a great appeal to men to conform themselves to a certain type of character. The moral ideal is the great thing, and the greatness of the ideal constitutes in itself an effective appeal. Now of course this is one absolutely true aspect of Christianity, an aspect inseparable from its central reality. And, since it is so, there is no difficulty whatever in finding the weightiest scriptural testimony to this most necessary and important aspect of the truth. It constitutes perhaps nowadays the most superficially popular view of the matter; while it certainly can claim weighty names among professed theologians. But is it the heart of the Gospel? Does the Gospel mean an appeal to motives, a standard of conduct, a rule of life;—however lofty, or beautiful, or true, or divine, the appeal as appeal, the standard as standard may be? This is a view of Christianity to which indeed churches, and ministries, and sacraments, creeds and catechisms and theologies, from the least of them to the greatest of them, may well be made to appear subsidiary and almost irrelevant. But is it, in any sense, distinctively Christian? Of course it is true that the ethical standard of Christianity is at once saner and loftier, as ethical standard, than that of any other religion in the world. But it is probably also true that it is in respect of excellence of ethical standard that some non-Christian religions approach most nearly towards a real comparison with Christianity. There are phases alike of Greek philosophy and of Oriental asceticism, which so far as insight and aspiration go, are very nearly as Christian as Christianity itself. What they lack is not so much moral insight, or the appeal which a moral ideal can make, as any effective means of entering into relation with the ideal. What they lack is power. They see, but they cannot do. They desire, but in the attempt to attain

they break to pieces. They are impotent yearning more than they are living experience.

Again there are those to whom Christianity means primarily a clear knowledge and a loyal acceptance of Bible history as history and as truth;—an acceptance of the Old Testament as preliminary, but more vitally still, an acceptance of the events of the earthly life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. To know these thoroughly, and to accept these loyally, as accomplished and significant facts, this is the Christian's great reality. Now here is a view of Christianity which puts the main stress upon knowledge of certain events. So far it may seem to be a matter of simple teaching. But the knowledge must be believing knowledge; and belief requires something more than study of a text. This conception, then, does not so easily dispense with creeds. For if the facts are more than an appeal to ordinary human motives of conduct, their significance must be expounded theologically. Theology becomes indispensable: and if theology then orthodoxy also. There must be right understanding; and there must be right belief.

Once more it may be admitted that this is an absolutely true aspect of Christianity, and that as such, it may be abundantly vindicated alike in scripture and in Christian experience. Moreover to speak of these things as *aspects* is more than to allow them a place as *parts* of Christianity. It means that it is quite reasonably possible, for certain purposes, and in certain relations, so to view the whole range of Christianity in the light of either of them, that either may seem, for the moment, to be a form or rendering of the whole, and either may in certain contexts be so described. But still, is the heart of what the Christian Gospel means quite adequately expressed either as ideal moral standard, or as belief in the events of the Gospel story,—or even as both combined?

There is a third view of the matter; a view which while insisting indeed upon the moral appeal which Christianity makes; and insisting upon the vital necessity of faith in the Gospel facts; yet holds that both of these are aspects and outcomes of something else which is even more the *differentia* of Christianity than either of them. This something is living power, a power infused by supernatural gift, a power which qualifies, and informs, and transforms, the natural personality. This power is the Spirit of the Christ, which is the Spirit of God indwelling in man, and constituting him what, in the Spirit, he is capable of becoming. Belief in this Power is belief in God the Holy Ghost.

The sphere of this Power is corporate and social. The true meaning of the Church of Christ is the Spirit of Christ. The Body is before the individual, and the individual is through as well as within the Body. The normal methods of this Power are sacramental. No doubt the Church can become political and corrupt. Historically it has done so, on a large scale. But this does not touch the true meaning of the Church, which remains the Brotherhood of the Spirit. No doubt God can work outside either Church or Sacraments; and the Sacraments, like the Church, can be abused by the grossest superstitions and degraded by mechanical use. But *abusus non tollit usum.* The Church remains after all the Brotherhood of the Spirit; and the Sacraments remain the outward channels, by Divine appointment, of Spiritual Life.

Now according to this third view, it is the supernatural life, the life of power, the life which is the meaning of the Church, the life of which Sacraments (spiritually conceived and received) are the normal channels, the life which is the Spirit, and therefore is Christ; it is this, and this alone, which constitutes the possibility of true faith in the

Gospel story, and which constitutes the possibility of any real relation, in personal experience, with the moral ideal of Christianity. It is into this that a child is baptized at the first. In the fulness of this he is sealed in confirmation. The devout communicant life is this. This is the faith, which is also the experience, in which and to which he is nurtured in the Church. It is this which is administered, in and by the Body, through the divinely authorized ministers of the Body. It is this which is guarded, explained, familarized, in creeds, catechisms, theologies. And this is the only access into anything else. Cut off this, this living faith, this living experience of the Holy Ghost in the Church, and the Gospel story becomes, at most, only a very touching and beautiful, but quite unattainable, episode in history: and the moral and spiritual standard of Christianity becomes, as such, an overwhelming despair.

Of course it is here implied that this third view represents, and has always been, the unexaggerated and unhesitating faith of the Church of Christ. But it is not necessary for the present purpose to attempt to argue that it is true. On the other hand, it is not the least relevant as an answer to all this, if anyone chooses to think that it is false. It is quite enough that, whether rightly or wrongly, it is firmly believed to be the truth by scores of thousands of good Churchmen and citizens. And I think it may fairly be pleaded also for the purpose that, so far from showing any sign of being a merely vulgar prejudice of the more ignorant, it is held most characteristically and clearly, in this as in almost every earlier generation, by those who, as saints and as theologians, have entered most deeply into the inner knowledge of Christian faith and experience. *Cuique in sua arte credendum.* This is what, speaking broadly, saints have meant by saintliness, and theologians have understood as theology. It is super-

natural Power. It is the non-self, or that which had been outside the self, and known to the self almost wholly in the way of contrast, now more and more essentially characterising the self.

To return to the inherent injustice of undenominationalism. Undenominationalism would in practice prohibit the whole of the teaching which alone, to this third point of view, gives either meaning or possibility to the other aspects of Christianity. The earthly events of the Gospel story might be known : but there could be no exposition of the work of the ascended Christ; no unfolding of the doctrine of the Holy Ghost; no appreciation of the Church as what it is; no experience of the Sacraments as what they ought to be. The Decalogue and the Sermon on the Mount might be taught, but only as a standard, that is, as Law, not Gospel. The ideal might be held up. But of the experience of Power, by which alone the ideal would become possible, there could be no real word. To those who see no great importance in Church or creeds or ministries or sacraments, it may seem no great injustice to insist on treating them as immaterial accessories. But what is the injustice to those to whom they constitute the real intelligence and possibility of all the rest ? It is not that the Churchman undervalues moral character, or wants to have Church observance added on to it also, whether as of higher or of lower value. It is no question at all of Sacraments *as an addition* to character; but of the Holy Ghost as the one possibility of character. The devout communicant does not look down on the life of simple goodness as inadequate; but his communion is to him as the core of his experience of Christ, and, therefore, of any simplicity of goodness. What adequate measure can there be of the injustice of the suppression of all distinctive Church teaching, in the interest of those who dissent from it, to those to whom the Christian ethical standard and even

the events of the Gospel story, would, apart from the experience of the Pentecostal Church, be a dream without hope or power ?

But if the undenominational method, adopted as a positive principle, and enforced by compulsion of law upon those who regard it with abhorrence, is found to be so profoundly unphilosophical in basis and so gallingly unjust in incidence ; where is the remedy ? An Education Law has become in modern times the business of the community as a whole. The community as a whole does not believe in the Church, and Churchmanship cannot be imposed upon the community. Of course it cannot. The community as a whole can only be perfectly just by being perfectly impartial between denominations. Such perfect impartiality can never be attained by imposing upon them all what is unjust to almost all of them, but unjust in almost incredibly unequal degrees of injustice. How then can it be obtained ? By precisely the opposite method : the method which gives expression to the only true justice, the only true liberalism ; the method of rigidly impartial denominationalism.

The community as a whole need not be, and is not, indifferent to religion. It need not, and does not, acquiesce in deliberately non-Christian education. But it must deal with the fact, which, whether deplorable or not, is at all events fundamental for the purpose, that Christians are sharply divided from one another. It is not, then, to be impartial as between religious and irreligious education. In England, at least, it does not need to be impartial as between Christian and non-Christian education. But so long as the different forms of Christianity differ as they do differ, it cannot wisely identify itself for this purpose with any one denomination more than another. Least of all can it, without frantic unwisdom, invent a new denomination of its own, under whatever specious title, and identify

itself wholly with that. It is necessary to insist the more clearly upon the duty of impartiality, because, as a matter of history, the religious body known as the Church of England has had, or been supposed to have, as the nationally "Established" Church, some special, if not exclusive, right to be the exponent and standard of the national religion ; and because it was, to an indefinitely large extent, from the religious motive, and under the shadow of this Church, that the fabric of national education in England grew up. It would, therefore, have been perfectly natural if, in the earlier stages of the Education controversy, some claim had been put forward, on the Church side, for exceptional rights over public education. But any shadow of such claim is definitely at an end. Whatever Establishment may still mean for other purposes, at least in relation to national education the disestablishment of the Church is an absolutely accomplished fact. Not a shadow of claim is, or is to be, put forward by Churchmen for Churchmen in this matter, which they would not put forward as emphatically in England for every other Christian body—and probably elsewhere, say in India, for instance, for every non-Christian religious body that was morally and politically tolerable.

How is the community to maintain its attitude of religious impartiality among denominations ? Not by superseding them all, or trying the impossible task of inventing a new one. But by treating them all with respect, and with precise equality of respect. Respect will mean, in this matter, something more than cold toleration. It will mean something like this.

The State, as State, will desire the education of all its citizens. The State, as State, will recognize that the education which it desires means not only the acquisition of knowledge but also, and even more importantly, a real training of moral character. The State, as State, will recog-

nize that the basis of moral character is religious experience. The State, as State, will therefore, for its own purposes, not tolerate, but most earnestly desire, the religious training of all its citizens. But the State will recognize that, as State, it cannot provide religious conviction or experience. Religion can only be taught, with real effect, by those to whom it is a definite reality. For religious training the State must look, in the nature of things, to the bodies which are animated by religious conviction. The State is not, and cannot make itself, a Church. The State can, of course, if it pleases, select any form of Church, and confer upon it exclusive privileges. Even so, for the religious impulse, it would have to look wholly to that Church. The State might support, but could not be, that Church.

But in point of fact, in respect of education, at least, we have reached a point in England at which this exclusive choice of any one denomination has become inconceivable. The State must remain impartial amongst denominations. And yet it must look to the denominations for the religion which for itself it intensely needs, but which it cannot, save through them, supply. The State desires religious citizens. The purpose of the State would therefore be served best of all if schools avowedly denominational, and educating on the basis of religious conviction, could cover the whole ground. The State does not decide whether Anglicanism is better than Wesleyanism, or Wesleyanism better than Agnosticism. But the State does realize that religious conviction is better than indifference. It would be served best if all the Anglicans in it were convinced and religious Anglicans, and the Romans religious Romans, and the Wesleyans religious Wesleyans, and the Congregationalists religious Congregationalists, and so on to the end ; the Agnostics conscientious Agnostics, the Mahommetans scrupulously true as Mahommetans, the Buddhists thoroughly sincere and aspiring Buddhists.

This is denominationalism. It is utterly different in principle from an establishment, in the first instance, of a great system at the public expense of "undenominational Christianity"; and the toleration, in the second instance, on exceedingly unequal terms, of denominational schools. This would put denominational schools as the thing first and most to be desired—not from the point of view only of the denominations severally, but from the point of view of the community as a whole. On this basis a measure to preserve denominational schools from extinction by national action, would lack no logic and require no apology. And this, in principle, is the true way of reconciling the maintenance of religion with a strictly impartial neutrality among forms of religion. It is probably the only effective mode of conservation. It is certainly the only true liberalism. It is only this which treats different forms of Christianity with respect; and with precise equality of respect. The forcible exclusion from national education of all definiteness of religious creed, even if it could be conceived to be otherwise desirable, is essentially incompatible with liberal principle. And it is astonishing to try and follow the processes by which so-called "liberalism" has been seduced into the ways of extreme religious intolerance.

Denominational schools, then, as such, should be, to the true liberal, the most to be desired,—(including, if it be so, amongst them, the "undenominational" sect)—and certainly, where such schools already existed, they would be the first and most to be encouraged and sustained by the State.

But it is true, no doubt, that denominational schools, however liberally encouraged by the State, do not and cannot cover the whole ground. It becomes, therefore, matter of national necessity to supplement them, in the second instance, by schools belonging to no denomination

in particular. But these schools should not therefore forget the importance of the denominational principle to national well-being. In these schools, no less than in the former, though many denominations meet in them, it should be the denominational principle which the State should most earnestly desire to carry out in every possible way. Wherever and however it were possible, all facility should be given for the provision of denominational instruction for the children of all sorts of denominations. The whole of the direct religious instruction should be—if only it could be—denominational.

But this again would be too much to be practically hoped for. Denominationalism, that is to say organized religious conviction really definite and really alive, though encouraged to do the utmost that it could, would necessarily, it is to be feared, leave very much undone. It is in that case only, as the third alternative, to be fallen back upon as a makeshift, when both the more desirable methods have unhappily broken down, that there is a real place for "undenominational" teaching, that is, for the attempt to give some general foundation of religious knowledge, with a neutral intention, and apart from any particular convictions or ordinances. There may be very considerable importance in such teaching of religious knowledge, if conscientiously given, where more serious training in religion is unhappily impossible. Whether more satisfactory or less, it would at least be an honest attempt to supply deficiency, not a piece of religious oppression. As has been said already, it is undenominationalism all round, undenominationalism as a positive principle, with the positive prohibition of more serious training in religion, which is a tyranny wherever it is imposed by compulsion, and a tyranny of more and more galling character, just in proportion as the convictions which it overrides are more and more specific and profound.

There is a further point about which it is important to speak plainly. If denominational schools of all kinds were present everywhere, no doubt every such school might be absolutely confined to children of its own denomination. But in point of fact it happens every day that children of one form of faith are, through pressure of necessity of one kind or another, practically compelled to attend a school whose principles their parents do not approve. And there is a great number of parishes in which there is, and can be, only one school, although there may be many denominations. In such cases it is most important, for denominational principle, that provision should be made for the full maintenance of denominational liberty. And therefore it is matter of the most profound regret to many Churchmen that the Bill was introduced without an express enactment of the principle that, in any or every primary school in the land, parents might lawfully provide religious instruction for their own children in accordance with their own faith. It is important, for that equity toward Dissenters which is essential to liberal principles, that this liberty should be secured wherever there is one school only, and that one school is Anglican. It is no less important, for that equity towards Churchmen which is essential to liberal principles, that the same liberty should be secured, wherever there is one school only, and that one school is Dissenting or is "undenominational."

There would, of course, be difficulty of all sorts in detail. You cannot suddenly equalize conditions everywhere, especially when the inequalities which exist are largely the outcome of a long and serious history. But it is the principle which matters—the principle of perfect religious fairness. Once get the principle true, and just, and illuminating; and much can be done, after all, in the way of making the best of difficulties in detail. Such a provision was an essential feature in the scheme that commended

itself to the Committees of the Convocations in July, 1901. Its omission is a grievous wound alike to the logic and to the fairness of the Bill. Its omission has done much to clothe a measure of justice to the Church with the aspect of a measure of injustice to the Dissenters.

The present Bill is of the nature of a national attempt to prevent the abolition of denominational schools. The instinct of at least a large part of the community recognises that so far its object is true and good. But it is, or is very largely supposed to be, an attempt to maintain them upon the old false hypothesis—or at least without any challenge or reversal, and therefore in apparent subordination to the old false hypothesis—that denominational definiteness is only as a sort of private fancy, to be tolerated in certain individual bigots or enthusiasts, but that the whole national policy and the whole public machinery must of course be "undenominational." The new measure is not easily compatible with the old hypothesis. No wonder that upon the old hypothesis it has largely failed to convince; and even given new heart and cohesion to the professional opponents of the government.

The present Bill may conceivably be the best practical way of attempting to do what certainly needs most urgently to be done. But as things stand, it is no wonder if it does not seem a very perfect measure to anyone. And certain it is that it is infinitely perilous. It seems to aim at saving denominational schools from abolition. But a very little alteration, such as those which were proposed on clause 7 in great numbers, would convert it outright into a measure for the ultimate, if not immediate, undenominationalizing of denominational schools, which would be their abolition as denominational. So altered, the Bill would be a measure of deadly hostility to the whole system which it seems to be designed to protect. Yet the alteration seems a plausible one, because the

present fashion of thought, the average unexamined presupposition of argument, is for the most part anti-denominational. For precisely the same reason, the alteration, if made, could hardly fail, in the present average temper, to be fatal in its working. The present popular temper has little respect for religion which it does not understand. It thinks it admirably just to control by the voice of the majority the consciences of all. The alterations, as urged, would everywhere make the average majority supreme—even within the special work of the minorities. But indeed, whether, under the circumstances of the moment, they appear to be plausible, or no, the alterations as urged, are, in themselves, amazing. It comes to this, that a measure may be passed for keeping denominational schools, as denominational, alive, provided they cease to be managed denominationally. What could be the use, or sense, of denominational schools, if the denominational principle were surrendered once for all? It is the attempt to conserve denominational schools on an apparent basis of undenominational presupposition, which makes possible this most paradoxical claim that denominationalism itself shall be undenominational! Truly the presupposition of undenominationalism leads to strange conclusions. But it is this presupposition of undenominationalism which is really the primary untruth.

Is it mere waste of time to denounce, as primary untruth, what has been, and is, so largely taken for granted as axiomatic? Is it an absolutely vain crying in the wilderness? Perhaps so. Certainly these pages are not written under any illusion as to probabilities. They are written rather under pressure of conscience than with any special hope of usefulness.

But the very fact that the general mind is dominated so largely by this idea may serve to illustrate the principle—if any illustration be needed—that it is ideas, as such,

which, whether for good or for mischief, do dominate the world. It is in the principle that the importance lies. Opponents will concede a good deal, in practice, for the moment, to denominational schools, provided that the principle of undenominationalism be paramount. They are perfectly right in their estimate of the comparative value of ideal principle. And conversely, the most convinced Churchmen might accept a good deal of neutral, undenominational effort in practice, provided only that it were done in strict subordination to the denominational principle—the principle of real religious liberty. The real conflict is a conflict of principles, of ideals; and the conflict of principle is the conflict that matters. It is religious liberty which is at stake. It is religious liberty which Churchmen really claim—for themselves alike and for all.

The dominance of ideas is conspicuous in every department of popular history. Most peoples have had their innate ambitions or antipathies. Again and again there have been places or times in which some one broad generalization or other has so completely dominated the general imagination and, as it were, possessed the very atmosphere of thought, that any protest on the other side sounded, to the popular ear, like a voice of foolishness, to be laughed down rather than to be considered seriously. So verbal inspiration has had its day; and unlimited Church authority; and unlimited individualism; and materialism; and philosophic utilitarianism; and the root principle "every man's hand against every man" as a scientific basis of economics or of politics. It is ideas like these—or (too often) prejudices more degraded and ignorant than these, but not less sweeping in momentary power—which seem to men in their day almost self-evident; which sweep men along with irresistible power; which it is thought almost idiocy to disbelieve, and sheer madness to challenge. There is nothing in the world so practical,

so irresistible in practice, as an idea once fully accepted as principle. And now undenominationalism seems to sway the public mind, in the manner of ideas like these. Men do not examine it. They assume it. And by that assumption they test and judge all rival theories.

Our contention, then, is in the region of ideal principles. Ideals do not always show their full import at the first. But they work themselves out with a relentless exactness, from which, sooner or later, there is no escaping. False ideals carry their own fatal nemesis. The materialistic hypothesis, or the utilitarian, or the fatalistic, or the agnostic, work, in one way or another, bitter havoc in the powers of the spiritual life. And similarly it is to be feared,—or something more than feared,—that undenominationalism once established as sovereign principle,—plausible though it may seem, and obviously just and delightful to the average imagination at the moment,—would mean ultimately the decay and death of all specific religious conviction, and therefore also, at the last, of all really religious character.

Boyle, Son & Watchurst, Printers, 3, 4 & 5, Warwick Square, E.C.